

Natural Hazards on the Reservation:

From the Water Resources Division

Flooding is just one of the natural hazards that affects the residents of the Reservation. The Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, which was developed by the Water Resources Division under the direction of the Multi-Hazard Mitigation Team, identifies eleven natural hazards that endanger lives, property, and cultural and natural resources on the Reservation: Flooding, Earthquakes, Tsunamis, Severe Winterstorms, Windstorms, Coastal Erosion, Drought, Wildfires, Landslides, Volcano Eruptions, and Tornadoes (one was observed in recent years in Whatcom County). These hazards have affected the Reservation in the past and can be expected to affect the Reservation in the future. Meeting these challenges with open eyes and planning for the future can prevent severe losses in the event of these hazards.

The Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies areas on the Reservation that are especially vulnerable to different hazards and proposes mitigation actions. These actions include projects that should minimize the effects that a hazard event would have. In the case of a major earthquake for example, new buildings will only be permitted that are constructed according to the building code adopted by the LIBC. These construction guidelines allow buildings to withstand the forces of an earthquake. Even if the building will be damaged, the inhabitants will not be buried under a collapsing structure. In the case of flooding, the LIBC is pursuing several projects that will raise roads up from the floodplain, so that the Lummi Peninsula will not be cut off from access and emergency services during a flood. The tsunami warning sirens (All Hazard Alert Broadcast Systems) were installed to warn residents of an advancing flood wave. The towers are tested every Friday at noon by the Lummi Police Department. Other mitigation actions involve public education. One example is the tsunami brochures that were sent out when the towers and the Reservation-wide tsunami signs were installed. Another one is the hazard fair that the students Northwest Indian College held in 2009.

The Multi-Hazard Mitigation Team (MHMT) is responsible for the implementation of mitigation actions and the proposal of new projects. The MHMT consists of the department heads and staff of the Natural Resources Department, the Planning Department, the Police Department, and since 2010, the Cultural Resources Department. The MHMT tracks mitigation priorities and oversees the updates of the Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. This year, the second update of the plan was due. It was originally developed in 2004 and previously updated in 2007. In 2004, the Lummi plan was the first plan nationwide that was approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The 2010 update was adopted by the LIBC on May 25 and approved by FEMA on July 22. The FEMA approval makes the tribe eligible for federal grants to help finance the proposed mitigation actions.

The Mitigation Plan is a “living” document that gets amended as new information becomes available and as new priorities are identified. The plan will become better with the involvement of the community. If you have ideas or concerns how to deal with natural hazards on the Reservation, we want to hear from you. Contact Monika Lange (monikal@lummi-nsn.gov or (360) 384 2396) at the Natural Resources Department with your suggestions.